

## *Chapter Seven*

### *Around 1991: The Rise of Queer Theory and the Lesbian Intertext*

Historians and other commentators on feminism and gay liberation widely acknowledge the influence of the civil rights movement on other liberation movements that followed. The standard chronology states that the civil rights movement made possible the black power movement, the antiwar movement, the women's liberation movement, and gay liberation.<sup>1</sup> Commentators rarely extend the litany beyond the early 1970s, treating the five movements as definitive of an era of direct-action politics. Typical of the American tendency to see things, as it were, in black and white, the Chicano power movement, American Indian movement, and other ethnic and racial identity movements often are ignored. Lesbian feminism, the multicultural women/lesbian of color movement of the 1980s, Queer Nation, and other more recent struggles don't make the cut-off, either because they are too recent or perhaps in some cases insufficiently direct-action oriented to neatly fit the category.<sup>2</sup> Related to the problem of historical periodization is the issue of genre. Historians who chronicle political movements rarely address parallel developments in academic writing, and academic theorists are none-too-consistent about acknowledging the influence of direct-action politics on their scholarship. The problem has been dubbed "the activist-academic split."

If it is reasonable to assume that the same civil-rights-black-power-antiwar-women's-liberation-gay-liberation legacy extends to lesbian feminism and the multicultural women/lesbians of color movement, then it ought to be a short step to acknowledging that contemporary poststructuralist theories of sexual identity—"queer theory"—belong to the same historical lineage. With few exceptions, queer theorists have obscured this genealogy, however, by emphasizing their academic predecessors—among them Continental postmodernist philosophies, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and cultural studies. Poststructuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism all took hold

within academic feminism in the U.S. after the literature, theory, and activism of lesbian-feminist/working-class/women of color had established difference as an unavoidable, integral topic of U.S. feminism on all levels. However, as Chela Sandoval argues in "U.S. Third World Feminism," white hegemonic feminism is most comfortable acknowledging its institutionally powerful (white, heterosexual, middle-class) roots. Insurgent, activist feminisms—including lesbian feminism and the poetry that constitutes some of its key early political theory—played as important a role in recent U.S. feminist and queer academic trends as did European developments in linguistics, psychoanalysis, and the like.

*"The Race for Theory": Privileging Postmodernism  
and Poststructuralism*

Queer theory certainly is not the first or only scholarly movement participating in the general trend toward poststructuralism that gathered steam in the humanities in the 1980s. Barbara Christian questions the motivations for the theoreticization of literary studies in her well-known essay "The Race for Theory" (1987). She worries that theory, which "has become a commodity that helps determine whether we are hired or promoted in academic institutions—worse, whether we are heard at all" (67), has "influenced, even co-opted" "black, women, Third World" critics "into speaking a language and defining their discussion in terms alien to and opposed to our needs and orientation" (68). Christian's argument is not with the practice of theory per se, but with "its academic hegemony" (69). At issue is not what theory includes but what it precludes, whom it silences. "Since I am slightly paranoid," Christian writes, "it has begun to occur to me that the literature [of radical people of color] being produced *is* precisely one of the reasons why this philosophical-literary-critical theory of relativity is so prominent" (73). It "surfaced, interestingly enough, just when the literature of peoples of color, black women, Latin Americans, and Africans began to move to 'the center'" (71).

While Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan are the major "New Philosophers" whom Christian implicates and indicts, famous white men are not the only culprits she names. She sees a parallel, hegemonic force in the Black Arts movement, which "resulted in a necessary and important critique both of previous Afro-American literature and of the white-established literary world," but in the process "became much like its opponent, monolithic and downright repressive" ("Race for Theory," 74). In the late

eighties, Christian identified white, middle-class feminists “eager to enter the halls of power” as the most recent participants in “the race for theory” (75).<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Black Arts movement excluded women, poststructuralist feminist criticism ignores women of color, and both movements deny histories of literature and literary criticism that do not fit their totalizing theories.

Sagri Dhairyam cites “The Race for Theory” in her essay “Racing the Lesbian, Dodging White Critics” (1994), in which she makes a similar point, specifically about queer theory:

Though academic analyses locate identity as a contingent filiation of discourses and help to destabilize a regime of heterosexual sameness, in the process, these analyses run the danger of erasing the experiential and affective realities of alternative sexualities and/or raced communities, which must constantly struggle not only to affirm their pleasure but to describe their terrors.” (33–34)

The irony of Dhairyam’s assimilation of academic theory and language into her critique of the same is not lost on the author, who apologizes early in the essay for “the turgid intellectualism of these speculations [which] minimizes the risks of speaking a lesbian body in professional space as they underwrite [her] stake in disciplinary, and in this case academic, power” (“Racing,” 26). Sharon Holland sees a similar power dynamic at play and calls for “*moving* to close the gap between ‘politics’ and ‘theory,’ ‘literature’ and ‘experience’” (“(White) Lesbian,” 254). Like Dhairyam, Shane Phelan cites Christian in her analysis of a “two-tier system of citizenship in feminist theory” and calls for “challenging the lines between philosophy, politics, and literature” (Phelan, *Getting Specific*, xix).

While Christian’s essay is often cited with (at least tacit) approval, the congratulations have not been universal. In the introduction to the special issue of *Cultural Critique* in which “The Race for Theory” first appeared, the editors disavow what they consider Christian’s opposition to “theoretical reflection” (JanMohamed and Lloyd, 7, 8–12). In the introduction to *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women* editor Cheryl A. Wall notes that “undoubtedly [Christian’s] words touch a responsive chord in many of [her] readers” (8) but argues that the time has come (in 1989) to participate in “the move to theory” (7). Similarly, in 1987 Hazel V. Carby approvingly cites Deborah McDowell’s call for black feminist and lesbian criticism to “expand to embrace other modes of critical inquiry,” which would challenge what she sees as naive, essentialist black feminist crit-

icism of the 1970s—the decade during which Christian and others established the field.<sup>4</sup> By 1991 Nancie E. Caraway saw the need to defend Christian and other “Black feminists [who] have questioned the emphasis of many feminist theorists” against the charge that they are “anti-intellectual scolds” (“Challenge and Theory,” 112). Without naming names, bell hooks grants that an antipoststructuralist stance similar to Christian’s can be “an apt and often-times appropriate comeback,” but argues that “it does not really intervene in the discourse in a way that alters and transforms” (“Postmodern,” 28).<sup>5</sup> Many other critics challenge Christian’s argument indirectly by ignoring it, that is, by forging ahead in a highly theoretical, poststructuralist/postmodernist discourse. Hooks states her strategy plainly: “To change the exclusionary practice of postmodern critical discourse is to enact a postmodernism of resistance. Part of this intervention entails black intellectual participation in the discourse” (“Postmodern,” 30).

Hooks’s critique occupies a unique moment; her essay exists on the border between skepticism toward postmodernism and commitment to challenging theory from the inside. Jane Gallop points out a similar moment in lesbian criticism, citing two versions of Bonnie Zimmerman’s often anthologized essay, “What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism.” In the original essay, published in 1981, Zimmerman writes,

To me *it seems imperative* that lesbian criticism develop diversity in theory and approach. Much as lesbians, even more than heterosexual feminists, may mistrust systems of thought developed by and associated with men and male values, *we may, in fact*, enrich our work through the insights of Marxist, structuralist, semiotic, or even psychoanalytic criticism. Perhaps “male” systems of thought are incompatible with a lesbian literary vision, but *we will not know until we attempt* to integrate these ideas into our work. (cited in Gallop, *Around 1981*, 177; emphasis added)

The passage is reprinted identically in Elaine Showalter’s 1985 anthology, *The New Feminist Criticism*, in which most of the essays were originally published in 1980–81 (Gallop, *Around 1981*, 178, 21). In a revised version of the essay, also published in 1985,<sup>6</sup> Zimmerman rewrites the passage:

Increasingly, lesbian criticism *has developed* diversity in theory and approach, [i]ncorporating the insights of Marxist, structuralist, semiotic and even psychoanalytic criticism. Although lesbians, perhaps more than heterosexual feminists, may mistrust systems of thought developed by and

associated with men and male values, our work *is in fact* richer and subtler for this incorporation. (cited in Gallop, *Around 1981*, 178; emphasis added)

As Gallop points out, by 1985 the incorporation of theory “has become a *fait accompli*” (*Around 1981*, 178).

### *“Around 1981”: The Institutionalization of Feminist Theory*

Gallop traces the incorporation of feminist criticism into the American academy in *Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory*, a study of twelve anthologies of “mainstream . . . American academic feminist literary criticism” (2) published between 1972 and 1987. Unlike Christian, Gallop argues that exclusion is the by-product of institutional acceptance. In other words, Christian (among others)<sup>7</sup> argues that feminist criticism went mainstream in order to silence radical voices; Gallop argues that feminist criticism ignored dissident, non- or “anti-theoretical” voices in order to go mainstream. Gallop interrogates but ultimately and pragmatically embraces the institutionalization of feminist criticism:

My focus is the institutionalization of feminist criticism; what, it might be asked, do I think about that? I think it is a fact. . . . I do not want to celebrate our being in. . . . But I do not want to bemoan it either. I want to understand why we are located here, how we got here, what we sacrificed to get here, what we gained. . . . How do we do the most good . . . speaking from this location. (*Around 1981*, 4–5)

At stake, according to Gallop, is the very definition of the subfield of feminist criticism. She explains that “there is an at least figurative nationalism at work in any definitional fencing off of literary territory” (37), and “such nationalism, whether now literal or figurative (as in the Lesbian Nation), involves a theoretical definition of the ‘national’ character which not only excludes foreigners but searches to purify the interior by expelling the alien within” (30).

“The alien within” is not only the radical, unruly feminist of color suggested by Christian but also the white feminist critic of the 1970s whose “Images of Women” criticism is scorned by the feminist theorist of the eighties. By 1981, the academic critic was no longer reading Susan Koppelman Cornillon’s *Images of Women in Fiction*, the first anthology of feminist liter-

ary criticism, published in 1972 (Gallop, *Around 1981*, 78, 77). Gallop explains,

Usually cited as the first phase of feminist literary study, considerations of Images of Women in literature are generally treated as juvenalia, of archival value at best. . . . Just two decades old, we already have a myth of our early years: a heroic, simpler time, when we were bold but crude. (79)

Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips echo Gallop on this point. In the introduction to *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, they write that the consensus among feminists in the 1970s on the nature of “relevant questions” to ask “should not be regarded as a symptom of underdevelopment—a ‘prehistory’ now well transcended in the sophistication of contemporary thought—for many of the issues posed in that period return to haunt the present” (2).

By 1984 Showalter proclaimed that a “second wave” had hit feminist criticism, comprised of academics who had come from “psychoanalytic, post-structuralist, or deconstructionist theory, rather than via the women’s movement and women’s studies.”<sup>8</sup> According to Gallop, Showalter’s 1985 anthology *The New Feminist Criticism* showcases the “rise of theory, which includes its usurpation of the place of the women’s movement” in feminist criticism (*Around 1981*, 22). Where earlier feminist critics had struggled to resolve the conflict between politics and aesthetics, by the mid eighties the “new feminist critics” were torn between the poles of politics and theory. “Where once [the academic feminist] looked to Emily Dickinson” as a canonically recognized writer, “now she pins her hopes on Julia Kristeva, ‘for in her can truly be found the female intellectual, demanding comparison with Derrida and Lacan.’”<sup>9</sup>

Gallop points out that although theory has become the dominant interest of feminist criticism, *Images of Women in Fiction* is still in print, suggesting that “for some readers this is not the remote past but the present” (*Around 1981*, 79). This is so not only because some teachers, students, and critics still find discussions of portrayals of women relevant but also because that is not all the anthology contains. Reading *Images of Women* for the first time in 1987, Gallop is surprised to find herself “excited by and enjoying some of the more sophisticated essays,” even as she is “embarrassed by some of the articles” that fit the stereotypical definition of “crude” earlier work (80).

Similarly, were contemporary queer theorists to pay attention to early lesbian-feminist literature and theory, they might be surprised to find sophisti-

cated representations of lesbian identity and politics. Examples from Pat Parker's and Judy Grahn's work include Parker's critique of identity labels in "Where Will You Be?" the "genderfuck" (to employ a popular "queer" term) of "My Lady Ain't No Lady," the incipient constructionism of "Child of Myself," the challenge to heterosexism of "For the Straight Folks," the response to racist essentialism in "Movement in Black," Grahn's send-up of psychoanalytic discourse in "The Psychoanalysis of Edward the Dyke," the eroticism of "in the place where" and "fortunately the skins," the interrogation of representation in "The Woman in Three Pieces," and the sense of play running through both poets' oeuvres.

### *Around 1991: The Rise of Queer Theory*

The parallels between Gallop's institutional history of feminist theory and the story of lesbian criticism and queer theory are inescapable. Classics of Images of Lesbians criticism include Jeannette Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956, reprinted in 1975 and 1985), Barbara Grier's book-length bibliography, *The Lesbian in Literature* (1967, reprinted in 1975 and 1981), and Jane Rule's *Lesbian Images* (1975). Lesbian critical "juvenalia" apparently lacks the staying power (that is, the market viability) of earlier straight feminist criticism; of the three, only *Sex Variant Women in Literature* is currently in print, published by a lesbian press committed to keeping lesbian classics available. There is a crucial difference between Images of Women criticism and early Images of Lesbians work; whereas Images of Women criticism like Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* was looking for and finding evidence of male writers' misogyny, early Images of Lesbians criticism was rejoicing in virtually any evidence of lesbian existence, even if the examples were deeply misogynist and antilebian. Pleased to lay claim to woman-identified heroes in history and literature, Foster's and Grier's works do not hesitate to chronicle lesbians carefully wherever they appeared in fiction, from pulp novels to the so-called great works. Grier uses an elaborate rating system to indicate whether entries in her bibliography include "major Lesbian characters and/or action," "minor Lesbian characters and/or action," "latent, repressed Lesbianism or characters who can be so interpreted. This type of behavior is properly termed 'variant behavior'; or 'trash.'"<sup>10</sup>

Zimmerman's call to incorporate "the insights of Marxist, structuralist, semiotic, or even psychoanalytic criticism" into lesbian criticism was first

sounded in 1981, the year in which Gallop places the institutionalization of straight feminist criticism. A decade later, "around 1991," queer theory similarly ascended to a position of recognized (if marginalized) institutional power, eclipsing earlier varieties of both Images of Lesbians criticism and lesbian-feminist political and critical theory which had gained some prominence within women's studies. As had been true of the rise of feminist theory, the rise of queer theory concentrated on work by white, middle-class academics and drew heavily on white male philosophers and social theorists. Just as the collective voice of lesbians of color was achieving prominence within and around the lesbian-feminist movement, queer theory eclipsed lesbian feminism in the academy.

What has come to be considered the first national lesbian and gay studies conference was held by the Yale University Lesbian and Gay Studies Center in 1986, but the first to gain national attention took place at Yale in 1989, when over five hundred people attended; the size and scope of the conference expanded greatly in 1990, when the fourth conference was held at Harvard. By the time the sixth national conference (held in 1994) was announced, organizers used the word queer in the title: "InQueery In Theory Indeed." The first Out Write lesbian and gay writers' conference was held in San Francisco in 1990. City College of San Francisco set up the first department of gay and lesbian studies in the U.S. in 1989 and created the first full-time tenure-track position in the field in 1991. The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the Graduate School of the City University of New York put out the first issue of its newsletter in 1991.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported in late 1990 that "the gay-studies movement is gaining acceptance in academe . . . with a surge in sophisticated scholarship"—by which the writer meant queer theory, naming Eve Sedgwick as the "lightning rod for [those] working in gay studies" (cited in Morton, "Politics," 121–22). Three of the germinal queer theory texts were published in 1990 and 1991: Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), and Diana Fuss's anthology, *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (1991), which opens with an essay by Butler. The "Queer Theory" issue of *differences*, cited by Robyn Wiegman as the first use of the term *queer theory* in an academic journal or book (Wiegman 171*m*), was published in 1991 and includes some of the proceedings of the "Queer Theory" conference held at UC Santa Cruz in 1990. The *Socialist Review* published its "Queer Innovation" issue at the beginning of 1992. Conferences, caucuses, and organizations had been set up earlier, but critical



mass was reached around 1991, with the ascendancy of queer theory and the movement for lesbian/gay studies centers and programs at many colleges and universities.<sup>11</sup>

When the massive, 666-page *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* was published by Routledge in 1993, its editors professed their affinity for the term *queer studies*. They explained that they used “lesbian and gay” in the title of the book only as a nod to “the force of current usage” (xvii). The anthology includes a range of writers—some contemporary queer theorists, others associated with older (though still current) lesbian, gay, or bisexual movements. The table of contents, however, is organized in sections whose titles echo contemporary queer theoretical language and concerns: “Politics and Representation,” “Spectacular Logic,” “Subjectivity, Discipline, Resistance.” An alternative organization of the essays along traditional disciplinary lines is provided in a “User’s Guide.” The inclusion of both organizational strategies points out the tensions in lesbian/gay/queer studies as well as the increasing interdisciplinarity of the humanities and social sciences. The inclusion of such lesbian-feminist classics as Adrienne Rich’s “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” and Audre Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic” signals the editors’ recognition of the range and history of lesbian/gay/queer studies. It also indicates more of a continuity than a paradigm shift between lesbian-feminist and queer theories, despite the presentist inclinations of some queer theorists.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, two-thirds of the essays reprinted in the *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* were originally published between 1988 and 1993, the period of the ascendancy of queer theory.

Sheila Jeffreys, a British lesbian-feminist critic known for her uncompromising opposition to queer theory, lambastes the *Reader* for treating feminism “as a minor theme within lesbian and gay studies . . . [a] slightly quirky minority perspective” (“Queer,” 467). In *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution* (1993) Jeffreys links queer theory to a “backlash” within “the lesbian community” in the 1980s and nineties against lesbian-feminist politics, parallel to “the backlash against feminism in general [that] has been powerfully documented by Naomi Wolf and Susan Faludi” (x). Jeffreys fires a number of well-placed salvos at queer theory, taking aim at “the disappearance of lesbians” and “women’s bodies” in much of the work and at the claims of gender neutrality for the term *queer* (“Queer,” 459, 471, 460). At times on the mark, elsewhere Jeffreys misstates some of queer theory’s basic precepts. (For example, she asserts that “queer politics accepts and celebrates the minority status of homosexuality” [469], ignoring or unaware of Sedgwick’s treatise on the “universalizing” rather than

“minoritizing” discourse of queer studies [Sedgwick, *Epistemology*].) Her particular doctrinaire brand of lesbian feminism, more characteristic of England and Australia than the United States in the 1990s, has led one queer critic to write that if Jeffreys “did not exist, Camille Paglia would have had to invent her. [*The Lesbian Heresy* confirms] the worst paranoid fantasies of the feminist baiters and the lesbophobes.”<sup>13</sup>

Other lesbian critics who are more difficult to dismiss criticize queer theory for reasons similar to Jeffreys’s. Zimmerman notes the “imperative” that “each generation of scholars . . . establish its credentials against those of the preceding generation” (“History,” 5), a practice that applies equally to the overlapping categories of activist and academic theory. She continues, “The work of first-generation feminist and lesbian scholars is . . . re-read or misread in order to provide a space in which younger scholars can develop their own theories and interpretations free from the stifling ‘anxiety of influence’ identified fifteen years ago by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.”<sup>14</sup> Invoking similar generational imagery, Lillian Faderman notes that “Queer Theory came out of the womb of gay and lesbian scholarship whose own parent was the identity politics born of the Stonewall Riots. But Queer Theory was fathered by postmodernist theory. And like the goddess Athena, its first allegiance appears to be to the father” (“Preface,” 12–13). The split between lesbian-feminist or lesbian/gay studies and queer theory is often described by both queer theorists and their detractors. Queer theorist Michael Warner writes that “the idea of queer theory may involve some generational myth-making” and makes reference to “the queer generation” (“From Queer,” 18, 19).

There are many exceptions to this sort of generalization, however; chronologically, *Identity Poetics* and I as its author should belong to the queer era, but obviously this volume harbors some reservations and illustrates a longer lesbian-historical memory than much of queer theory, even as it reflects a clear, queer influence. To the extent that lesbian feminism informs queer theory—and, more important, that the work of working-class/lesbians of color prefigures postmodern insights about positionality, coalition, and multiply located, shifting “identity”—the neat divide by generation quickly breaks down. (That is, for example, to the extent that it is accurate to call Lorde’s work “postmodern” or “queer,” nevertheless one could not argue that it is part of a younger queer generation.) It should be obvious that queer theory was not institutionalized by young graduate students (though the enthusiasm and hard work of many helped to propel it) but rather by tenured scholars with access to the instruments of academic power—academic jour-

nals, fellowships, professorships. While queer theory arose after lesbian feminism did, it is not necessarily true that all young lesbians call themselves “queer” while all older scholars and activists prefer “lesbian-feminist.” (And what would be the dividing line? Thirty-five years old? Forty-five? Sixty?) While queer may have more cachet, both strains of thought—dare I say, both *identities*—coexist, sometimes within the same person, and they inform one another as lesbian theory continues to develop.

In “Against Proper Objects,” Judith Butler explores the danger of opposing lesbian and gay studies to feminism, as she analyzes the way the editors of *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* seek to define the new field against the older one:

The second term (gay and lesbian studies) is distinguished from the first (feminist studies) through a separation of the kinds of objects they pursue. . . . And though the language of the editorial introduction to the volume appears to appreciate the feminist precedent, this is an idealization which is perhaps not without its aggression. . . . The institution of the “proper object” takes place, as usual, through a mundane sort of violence. Indeed, we might read moments of methodological founding as pervasively anti-historical acts, beginnings which fabricate their legitimating histories through a retroactive narrative, burying complicity and division in and through the funeral figure of the “ground.” (4, 6)

Sue-Ellen Case’s astute, humorous account also merits quoting at length, as she describes the misrepresentation of various lesbian styles to fit the dismissable stereotype of lesbian feminism that was in widespread circulation by the early 1990s:

From the developing perspective of queer, lesbian became conflated with what was once more specifically identified as radical feminist politics. . . . Soon, in queer quarters, it seemed that all lesbian feminists had been wearing Birkenstocks and ripping off their shirts at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. Some of us chortled at the revisionist image of bar/butch/feminist dykes listening to acoustic guitars. . . . Slapping each other on the back, we joked, “was lesbian s/m invented by Gayle Rubin and Pat Califia in an argument with antiporn advocates?” . . . What a surprise . . . to learn that queer dykes associated . . . sexual promiscuity as more narrowly particular to a gay male culture that they would then need to assimilate and imitate. Butch feminists, it seemed, had been having

monogamous, vanilla, Saturday-morning slight sex since the 1970s. We snickered. Then it wasn't funny anymore. ("Toward," 209–10)

The issue of historicity is especially of concern to second-wave feminists who remember that an important project of the movement has been to recover lost or suppressed historical information. Citing Adrienne Rich's watershed 1976 MLA address, "It Is the Lesbian in Us . . .," Zimmerman comments that queer theory "either render[s] invisible, unknown, 'unspeakable' the history of lesbian (and, equally, feminist) theory, scholarship, and criticism—or, perhaps more important, distort[s] it in such a way as to render it unrecognizable" ("History," 7). Her and other critics' concern resonates with many feminist critics' skepticism toward the larger project of poststructuralist theory; in Wiegman's words, "For a number of feminists who have approached the question of the postmodern, it is [postmodernism's] circumvention of historical metanarrativity that defers any kind of positive embrace of the postmodern" ("Introduction," 12–13). Stated more simply by Jeffreys, "The reader [of queer theory] can feel as though a women's liberation movement and lesbian feminism never existed" ("Queer," 462). Barbara Smith, whose many years of writing and organizing have been committed to coalition politics, comments, "Unlike the early lesbian and gay movement, which had both ideological and practical links to the left, black activism, and feminism, today's 'queer' politics seem to operate in a historical vacuum" ("Queer Politics," 13).

In *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*, Terry Castle takes exception with queer theory not in the name of lesbian-feminist history but in defense of lesbian itself as a category. Calling herself "flagrantly out of step with current thinking" (13), Castle writes that she has "resisted placing [her] version of lesbian phenomenology under the currently fashionable rubric of queer theory" because of queer theory's tendency to privilege gay men and erase lesbians under "pseudo-umbrella terms" (12). Castle indicts Sedgwick, "currently the most eloquent proponent of 'queer theory' in the academic world," for her exclusive focus on men (13, 66–91), and disagrees with such queer theorists as Judith Butler—"lesbian and gay scholars trained in Continental philosophy [among whom] it has recently become popular to contest, along deconstructionist lines, the very meaningfulness of terms such as *lesbian* or *gay* or *homosexual* or *coming out*" (13–14). Butler "goes farther in this direction than any other major queer theorist," according to Warner ("From Queer," 19), and is the queer theorist most closely associated with a postidentity stance. An excerpt from the first paragraph of Butler's "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," the lead essay in

Diana Fuss's *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, exemplifies queer theory's critique of identity categories:

To write or speak *as a lesbian* appears a paradoxical appearance of this "I," one which feels neither true nor false. For it is a production, usually in response to a request, to come out or write in the name of an identity which, once produced, sometimes functions as a politically efficacious phantasm. I'm not at ease with "lesbian theories, gay theories," for as I've argued elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression. This is not to say that I will not appear at political occasions under the sign of lesbian, but that I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies. (13–14)

It is perhaps the usefulness of identity categories as "rallying point" that most concerns queer theory's lesbian and gay critics. Simon Watney, a prominent AIDS activist, asks, "If the rejection of identity politics is what 'queer theory' means . . . then who needs it?" (quoted in Warner, "From Queer," 19). Warner, who in at least two essays has taken up the job of defining and defending queer theory, responds that Watney has misread Butler (19). And, indeed, if in "Against Proper Objects" Butler does not promote identity politics, she certainly stands up for feminist analysis. Wiegman seems to shore up Watney, however, when she explains in *The Lesbian Postmodern* why that book's title is an unsolvable paradox:

So what is the lesbian postmodern? The language itself constrains, acting too much like a category, too much like a name. . . . Quite rightly, or so it seems to me, the lesbian postmodern slips and shifts Monique Wittig's decidedly modernist proclamation: not just that the lesbian is "not a woman" but the lesbian is not—cannot continue to be—"the lesbian" either. (16)

Faderman views queer theory's postidentity stance "with some alarm,"

since the concept of gay identity was crucial to ["the older generation of scholars"], whether or not they believed that homosexuality was a social construct. Because we had defined a gay and lesbian identity (as fictive and limited as it may have been), and an identity politics that grew out of it, we were able to form our caucuses in professional organizations, agitate to

teach gay and lesbian courses, and initiate gay and lesbian scholarship. We saw our construction of gay and lesbian identity as the sine qua non that would lead to our successes. ("Preface," 11)

Faderman partially seems drawn to queer theory, recognizing that the insights of "the older generation" have some limitations. But she reasserts the importance of the construction—not the unquestioning assumption—of identity politics as a crucial "political tool," harking back to the original Combahee River Collective formulation.

Yet a fair amount of queer theory's considerable intellectual fire power is aimed at its political and academic predecessors, particularly the many forms of lesbian-feminist and lesbian and gay theory, misread as naive expressions of essentialist identity politics. Teresa de Lauretis writes in the introduction to the "Queer Theory" issue of *differences* that the term *queer theory* is intended to "transgress and transcend . . . or at the very least problematize" the terms *gay* and *lesbian* (v). In that benchmark 1991 essay, de Lauretis envisions queer theory succeeding where Terry Castle sees it fail, arguing that queer theory must interrogate the silencing of lesbians under the rubric of "lesbian and gay," which implies but then "covers over" gender differences (v–vii). Since de Lauretis's declaration, a raft of lesbian and feminist critics have called the term *queer* a false generic that erases the existence of lesbians and the insights of feminism. It is worth noting that the activist group the Lesbian Avengers organized at least in part as a response to the male bias of and the invisibility of lesbians within Queer Nation. Julie Abraham devotes an entire *Village Voice* essay to exposing the male-centered canonicity of queer studies ("I Know"); Butler herself cautions against the "masculinist" and "'gayocon' sensibility" that "has arrived in queer studies" via the relegation of gender (and thereby women) to feminism ("Against," 22). Farwell pens her study of lesbian narrative in the face of queer criticism's focus on "gay male literary themes" (*Heterosexual Plots*, 5), and Zimmerman poses the "urgent question . . . how to maintain the specificity of lesbian textuality, culture, identity, community—in short, existence—within the claim of generic gayness or queerness" (Zimmerman, "'Confessions,'" 166). Although much prominent queer theory is written *by* women, it is most often not written *about* lesbians.

In "Queer Theory," de Lauretis expresses hope that queer theory can avoid the racism, as well as the sexism, of lesbian and gay studies: "Can our queerness act as an agency of social change, and our theory construct another discursive horizon, another way of living the racial and the sexual?" (x–xi).

Given the presumption that “critical dialog alone can provide a better understanding of the specificity and partiality of our respective histories”—and given that the queer “critical dialog” has been almost exclusively among white academics—it is not surprising that queer theory, like so many other discourses, largely has failed to meaningfully address race and class. A number of critics have commented on the racist and classist implications of queer theory, from Abraham noting that the field’s focus on the canon “give[s] us again the Greeks, the English Renaissance, the American Renaissance, Oscar Wilde” (“I Know,” 21) to Sagri Dhairyam’s observation that “‘queer theory’ comes increasingly to be reckoned with as a critical discourse, but concomitantly writes a queer whiteness over raced queerness; it domesticates race in its elaboration of sexual difference” (“Racing,” 26). “I did read recently that there’s a queer book coming out in which race is central,” Beverly Guy-Sheftall reports dryly. “But,” she adds, “most of queer theory is very insensitive to race” (“New Directions,” 31).<sup>16</sup> No wonder, then, that by her 1997 essay, “Fem/Les Scramble,” de Lauretis voices her disappointment that some took the “‘gender and race neutrality’” of the term *queer theory* to be “a plus” (4).

When de Lauretis wrote in 1991 that “racial as well as gender differences are a crucial area of concern for queer theory” (“Queer Theory,” xi), she was either inaccurately portraying the movement, stating a goal as an accomplished deed, or applying the label *queer theorist* to a great many lesbians and gay men of color not usually considered (by themselves or others) as such. Some critics argue, like Harriet Malinowitz, that postmodernism “is of particular importance to subjugated peoples” as it “puncture[s] the master cultural narratives that swallow up anarchic and infinitely complicated human difference” (“Lesbian Studies,” 265). Others question, like Case,

If queer . . . claims to cut across differences . . . and all the “antinormal” could be included in its embrace, and if it also claims multicultural representation at its base, then why do we read things like the following? Cherrie Moraga, the lesbian Chicana poet and dramatist writes:

We discussed the limitations of “Queer Nation,” whose leather-jacketed, shaved-headed white radicals and accompanying anglo-centricity were an alien-nation to most lesbians and gay men of color (*The Last Generation* 147). (Case, “Toward,” 216–17)

While Malinowitz’s analysis of modernist master narratives hits its mark, while the potential of queer theory may be there, it most often fails to deliver on the promise of providing a useful liberatory analysis of class and race.

Like de Lauretis's early defense of queer theory's activist applicability, Butler in her essay "Critically Queer" defends theorists "who have questioned the presentist assumptions in contemporary identity categories" against the charge that they are "depoliticizing theory." Butler, who writes some of the densest academic prose in the field of queer theory, asserts that "the critique of the queer subject is crucial to the continuing *democratization* of queer politics" because at its best queer theory both affirms "outness" and questions who can afford to be "out" in a sexist, racist, classist society. She writes, "The genealogical critique of the queer subject . . . constitutes a self-critical dimension within activism, a persistent reminder to take the time to consider the exclusionary force of one of activism's most treasured contemporary premises," that is, the importance of coming out ("Critically Queer," 227). Butler makes this statement without irony, failing to consider the problem of audience created by her own highly exclusionary prose. First published in the inaugural issue of the scholarly *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, the essay claimed a relatively small academic readership. To her credit, Butler recognizes the democratizing potential of the critique of the provisional term *queer*, noting that it could "initiate a resurgence of both feminist and anti-racist mobilization within lesbian and gay politics" (228–29), presumably by people who feel left out by the false generic, if in Butler's view historically temporary, term *queer*.

Like de Lauretis, in "Critically Queer" Butler sounded less convincing than optimistic that queer studies would interrogate the intersections of race and sexuality (229). The following year, in "Against Proper Objects," she productively took up the issue herself. She explains that the establishment of lesbian and gay studies (sexuality studies) as distinct from women's studies (gender studies) renders impossible or invisible "the various anti-racist positions developed within feminist frameworks for which gender is no more central than race, or for which gender is no more central than colonial positionality or class—the domains of socialist feminism, postcolonial feminism, Third World feminism" (15–16). Specifically, the polarization of queer theory and feminist theory "denies the emergence of a feminism specific to women of color in the U.S. who have sought to complicate the feminist framework to take account of relations of power that help to constitute and yet exceed gender, including race and racialization, as well as geopolitical positionality in colonial and postcolonial contexts" (17)—writers such as Norma Alarcón, Cherríe Moraga, Chandra Mohanty, Valerie Smith, Hortense Spillers, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and others (5).

Whereas Butler's understanding of the limits of queer studies leads her to



point to the “contingency” of the term *queer*, in *Tendencies* (1993) Sedgwick claims “that something about *queer* is inextinguishable” (xii). She asserts that “lesbian or gay” must stand at the “definitional center” of the term *queer* (8), but throughout her introductory chapter she uses *queer* to signify a diffuse “condition in which things ‘can’t be made to line up neatly together’” (Mohr, 24, “When Men,” citing Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 3, 6, 13). Sedgwick explains that she prefers the “experimental” and radically contextual/connotative word *queer* to the denotative “‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ [which] present themselves (however delusively) as objective, empirical categories governed by empirical rules of evidence (however contested)” (*Tendencies*, 9).

Sedgwick’s parenthetical swipes at lesbian and gay meaning provide a good example of why Castle insists on naming her own work “lesbian” instead of “queer”:

I believe that we live in a world in which the word *lesbian* still makes sense, and that it is possible to use the word frequently, even lyrically, and still be understood. . . . And indeed, I still maintain, if in ordinary speech I say, “I am a lesbian,” the meaning is instantly (even dangerously) clear: I am a woman whose primary emotional and erotic allegiance is to my own sex. (*Apparitional*, 14–15)

Castle insists on placing definition in the everyday world, in which shared, sometimes dangerous meanings can be painfully obvious.

One of the projects of queer theory, with its goal of “queering” all inquiry—its “aggressive impulse of generalization” (Warner, *Fear*, xxvi)—has been to come full circle and engage in “images of” criticism, with a twist. Rather than looking for instances of homophobia in straight literature, or isolated examples of putative queer heroes, some theorists argue that the canon of Western civilization is itself queer. As Abraham quips, “We were everywhere. Now we are the world” (“I Know,” 20). In this respect, Castle is more in line with queer theory than she might like. (Castle does note, however, that “the canny reader will find the volatile traces” of Sedgwick’s influence throughout *The Apparitional Lesbian* [13].) The project of *The Apparitional Lesbian* is to make visible the “ghosted” lesbian characters in Diderot, James, the opera, the *New Yorker*—indeed throughout modern Western civilization.

For Sedgwick the traditional literary canon provides infinite possibilities for queer studies, defined in part as “the process of making salient the homosocial, homosexual, and homophobic strains and torsions in the already existing master-canon” (*Epistemology*, 51). While feminist critics had

to muster a separate female canon to answer the question "Where is your Shakespeare?" queer scholars can point to the pervasively queer (if male) character of the traditional canon.

Has there ever been a gay Socrates?

Has there ever been a gay Shakespeare?

Has there ever been a gay Proust?

Does the Pope wear a dress? If these questions startle, it is not least as tautologies. A short answer, though a very incomplete one, might be that not only have there been a gay Socrates, Shakespeare, and Proust but that their names are Socrates, Shakespeare, Proust. (Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 52)

Lesbian feminists addressed the question imaginatively, if less concretely, on a poster for the Third Annual Lesbian Writers Conference in Chicago (1976), which reads, "And the men ask, 'Where is your Shakespeare?' She was a Lesbian, and you burned her books." Sedgwick's approach not only resurrects queer heroes but also asserts that the canon can never "be treated as the repository of reassuring 'traditional' truths that could be made matter for any settled consolidation or congratulation" (*Epistemology*, 54).

In "Fear of a Queer Planet," Michael Warner writes that he sees a parallel between Sedgwick's queer work (around 1991) and earlier feminist criticism (around 1981), which "open[ed] up when feminists began treating gender more and more as a primary category for understanding problems that did not initially look gender-specific" (xiv). Warner is one of the only queer theorists who speaks of a connection between earlier lesbian or feminist theory and queer theory—but he confuses history at times, even when he is trying to honor it. The subtitle of his essay, "From Queer to Eternity: An Army of Theorists Cannot Fail," is a clear play on the 1970s slogan "An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail." Warner appears eager to give credit where credit is due, but he does not seem to know what the term *lesbian feminist* means. He calls Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Mayne, Sue-Ellen Case, Judith Roof, Judith Butler, and Diana Fuss—with the exception of Wittig, all academic poststructuralist theorists—"this tradition of lesbian feminism," because they are "women who write about women" ("From Queer," 18). On the other hand, Warner does acknowledge that many lesbian scholars (and here he means lesbian feminists) have worked "without recognition or reward for years—some as independent scholars, others as academics who often suffered in their careers for doing lesbian work—only to see a younger generation cashing in for having the same

interests" ("From Queer," 18). Amid the differences Warner finds a remarkable "continuity of interests" between the republished gay liberation anthology *Out of the Closets* (1992) and the *differences* "Queer Theory" issue (1991): interest in racial difference, how power relationships shape sexuality, the interdependence of feminist and gay resistance, and a "sense of alienation from most available ways of affirming identity" ("From Queer," 18–19).

Others who have pointed out queer theory's debt to feminism and gay liberation—such as Abraham, Lisa Duggan, Faderman, Rosemary Hennessy, Jeffreys, and Zimmerman—have been more critical of queer theory than Warner. Margaret Homans sees queer theory as a direct descendant of feminist criticism:

1970s feminist criticism made possible the lively discussion of the construction of gender going on nowadays, and even the work going on under the rubric of queer theory, with its occasional rejection of gender as a useful category of analysis. We could not be talking about gender or sexuality in any of the ways we do now if [it] weren't for the feminist reformation of literary history. (*Feminist Criticism*, 3–4)

Homans calls queer theory one of the "new fields of inquiry that feminist literary history has vanished into" (8).

Situated within the academy—which serves as both audience and source of legitimation—queer theory seems to have little use for activist movements preceding ACT-UP and Queer Nation that helped create the social space for antihomophobic academic work. A handful of critics who are not typically associated with lesbian feminism—including Judith Halberstam, Harriet Malinowitz, and Tania Modleski—have published essays that in various ways include lesbian feminism as part of queer theory's genealogy (Halberstam, "Queering," 260–61; Malinowitz, "Lesbian Studies," 268; Modleski, "White Negress," 79). But Zimmerman accurately assessed the lay of the land, speaking on the same MLA panel as Homans in 1994: "One could conclude from contemporary writing [i.e., queer theory] that lesbian theory emerged full-grown from the head of Lacan or Foucault around 1989. The depth and richness of lesbian criticism and theory from the early 1970s on is being ignored and lost" ("History," 2).

The phenomenon is not without precedent, of course. Lesbian feminists in the 1970s repudiated the essentialist position of both homophile activists and butch-femme bar culture (which were often at odds with each other in the 1950s and sixties), but in the 1980s and nineties historians have argued

persuasively that lesbian and gay culture in the 1950s enabled the lesbian-feminist and gay liberation movements to arise and flourish.<sup>17</sup> Although Margaret Cruikshank explains in *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* that “lesbian feminism originated in the women’s movement rather than in the homophile movement” (167), she states that Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian organization in the United States (founded in 1955), “laid the groundwork for lesbian feminism of the next decade” (148).

Historian John D’Emilio explains that in the 1970s

young gay radicals exhibited as little respect toward the homophile movement as they did toward the institutions of American society. They scorned its moderation and reformist politics. . . . Many of the shifts that occurred in [the 1970s] were due to the weakening of traditional centers of power caused by the protest movements of the 1960s, but the relative ease with which gay liberationists accumulated victories can only be explained by the persistent, plodding work of the activists who preceded them. The homophile movement deserves kinder treatment than it has received. The popular wisdom of gay liberation needs to be reevaluated. (D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 240)

### *Audience and the Problem of “Citationality”*

I am arguing that the “popular wisdom” of queer theory “needs to be reevaluated,” in part because queer theory suffers from an apparent problem of what Butler (following Derrida) in a different context has called “citationality” (*Bodies*, 13). In “Critically Queer,” Butler explains that “citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices” or discourse gives “binding power” to a performative speech act (227, 225). (For example, a judge’s verdict relies on citation of socially sanctioned legal precedent.) Queer theory as it is usually practiced indeed “accumulates the force of authority” (Butler, *Bodies*, 227) from its choice of academic citations.

In Butler’s *Bodies That Matter*, in which “Critically Queer” is reprinted, citations to works by people of color occur almost exclusively in chapters specifically devoted to people of color and/or the construct of race. While Butler’s attention to an African American writer (Nella Larsen, in chapter 6) and a film about African American drag queens (*Paris Is Burning*, produced and directed by white lesbian filmmaker Jennie Livingston, in chapter 4) is laudable, if unusual, for queer theory, her citational practice appears oddly

segregationist—an apt metaphor, since the only people of color she discusses are African American. Judith Roof notes a similar phenomenon in predominantly white, heterosexual feminist anthologies of literary criticism published in the 1980s, in which black and lesbian function as “the excess that disrupts the disrupters, but they also . . . are kept separate but equal” (*Lure*, 224). Do lesbian and gay men of color contribute nothing historically or presently to queer theory itself, as their absence as citational reference points in “Critically Queer” implies? Do white queers not have race?

Butler anticipates this sort of criticism in her introduction, and seeks to deflect it by maintaining that, as the saying goes, you can’t please all of the people all of the time:

On the one hand, any analysis which foregrounds one vector of power over another will doubtless become vulnerable to criticisms that it not only ignores or devalues the others, but that its own constructions depend on the exclusion of the others in order to proceed. On the other hand, any analysis which pretends to be able to encompass every vector of power runs the risk of a certain epistemological imperialism which consists in the presupposition that any given writer might fully stand for and explain the complexities of contemporary power. (*Bodies*, 18–19)

Thus, Butler circumnavigates the “simultaneous nature of . . . oppression” described in 1977 by the Combahee River Collective, and by many others since. Butler points out that she does pursue “the political problematic of operating within the complexities of power” in two chapters and part of a third (*Bodies*, 19). The number of chapters is not the issue here but rather the relegation of expertise according to a sort of identity politics that Butler and other constructivist queer theorists disdain. Ultimately, Butler defends herself with the idea that others will take up where she left off—or out:

Taking the heterosexual matrix or heterosexual hegemony as a point of departure will run the risk of narrowness, but it will run it in order, finally, to cede its apparent priority and autonomy as a form of power. This will happen within the text, but perhaps most successfully in its various appropriations. Indeed, it seems to me that one writes into a field of writing that is invariably and promisingly larger and less masterable than the one over which one maintains a provisional authority, and that the unanticipated reappropriations of a given work in areas for which it was never consciously intended are some of the most useful. (19)

To discuss topics ranging from film to literature to queer theory itself, in *Bodies That Matter* Butler lines up a dazzling series of theoretical heavy hitters: Aristotle, Nietzsche, Foucault, Plato, Irigaray, Freud, Žižek, Spivak, Althusser, Derrida, and Lacan. With such impressive academic credentials, it is small wonder that queer theory, not lesbian feminism, gained the power position “around 1991.” Lesbian feminists in the 1970s attempted to rid their communities of the taint of patriarchy; queer theory embraces some of its most prominent academic spokesmen (and token women), if for stated anti-establishment ends.

Is exclusion the by-product of institutional acceptance, as Gallop argues in the case of feminist theory? Or is mainstreaming a means to excluding nonacademically acceptable voices, as Christian would have it? Without lesbian feminism, women-of-color feminism, and gay liberation (among other movements) there would be no “free spaces” for queer theory.<sup>18</sup> Yet, Butler’s “Against Proper Objects” notwithstanding, queer theory often leaves out recognition of lesbian-feminist/working-class/women-of-color forerunners and contemporaries. Phelan’s work on “postmodern lesbian politics,” on the other hand, is a good example of academic theory that acknowledges its affinity with the work of lesbian feminists, lesbians of color, *and* queer theorists—proof positive that a provocative, sophisticated, and scholarly book does not need to ignore the diversity of lesbian intellectual and activist history.

While queer theory is often perceived and presented as the avant-garde, an intertextual historical reading illuminates similarities between queer theory and other lesbian/gay movements and genres. Frequently the message of queer theory (indeed, of much poststructuralist theory) is not as new as it appears to be in its academic context. What is often different is the intended audience: then, a marginalized activist readership, now, an academic one steeped in the high theoretical traditions of Continental philosophy. One reason for the difference is that some of the earlier activist writers were creating the academic fields that later writers took for granted. Often lacking the privilege of academic positions, activist writers did not (and many still do not) have any stake in pleasing an academic readership. This is not to say that there are no real disagreements among various lesbian, gay, and queer thinkers but rather to suggest that many of the arguments have been around for a long time, like the social-constructionist/essentialist argument lesbian feminists had with “gay women” in the late sixties and early seventies.

A difference of language usually accompanies the difference in perceived audience for queer and lesbian-feminist theories. Faderman contends that the poststructuralist

jargon of Queer Theory . . . ignores and even cuts out much of the audience that needs to be served by gay and lesbian studies—undergraduate students, non-academic gays and lesbians, and the non-academic world in general, whose prejudices and ignorance about homosexuality need to continue to be challenged in language that addresses them clearly.” (“Preface,” 12).

Lisa Duggan noted the tendency of presenters at the Rutgers Lesbian/Gay Studies conference in 1991 to “reference Lacan, Foucault, and Bourdieu while neglecting (relatively) the contributions of the activist writers, independent scholars, and cultural producers who created the conditions for theoretical commentary. . . . Different languages and audiences bring very diverse (read: ‘unequal’) access to resources and rewards” (27). Or, as Papusa Molina put it at the 1995 National Women’s Studies Association conference lesbian caucus meeting, “It’s a class issue.”<sup>19</sup> These criticisms mirror Parker and Grahn’s concerns with accessible language—in Parker’s words, “to put the poetry in the language that we speak,” a rejection of academic and traditional poetic language that Parker knew would “get [her] in trouble” with critics outside the activist women’s movement (Rushin, “Pat Parker,” 28). Indeed, Rich’s evocation of “a common language” and “a whole new poetry” got her in trouble aplenty.

In her essay “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” Donna Haraway argues for the necessity of political coalition as analogous to science fiction “cybernetic organism[s] . . . creatures simultaneously animal and machine” (191). Haraway, a postmodern critic who like Phelan cites her sources, draws on writings about coalition politics by lesbian and straight women of color, including works by Chela Sandoval, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Bernice Johnson Reagon. Of the three, whom Haraway cites together in one footnote, Reagon’s “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century” is the farthest removed from the academy; the essay is the transcript of a talk presented in more or less conversational language at a women’s (predominantly lesbian-feminist) music festival. Sandoval and Trinh write from and into an academic context.

Both Haraway and Reagon situate the necessity for feminist, antiracist, antiheterosexist coalition in a technologically complex world. Haraway sees the identity category “women of color” as emblematic of postmodern cyborg consciousness, built on what Sandoval calls “oppositional consciousness” and Haraway defines as “a kind of postmodernist identity [constructed] of otherness, difference, and specificity” (“Manifesto,” 197). All of us, according to Haraway, must embrace “permanently partial identities” (196) in a

postmodern world in which we are all “cybernetic organisms” plugged into the political and technological “integrated circuit,” a construct and a reality that can either destroy us or work for us. Haraway discusses the fragmentation of feminism along identity lines and the possibilities for reunification through coalition:

It has become difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective—or even to insist in every circumstance upon the noun. Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic. . . . Painful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every possible fault line has made the concept of woman elusive, an excuse for the matrix of women's dominations of each other. . . . The recent history for much of the U.S. Left and the [*sic*] U.S. feminism has been a response to this kind of crisis by endless splitting and searches for a new essential unity. But there has also been a growing recognition of another response through coalition—affinity, not identity. (“Manifesto,” 196–97)

Reagon warns her women-only, mostly white audience that in the age of communications technology “we've pretty much come to the end of a time when you can have a space that is ‘yours only.’ . . . There is no hiding place. There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. It's over. Give it up” (“Coalition,” 357). Reagon distinguishes between affinity based on identity—the periodically necessary resting place she calls “home”—and coalition based on shared goals: “You don't go into coalition because you just *like* it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that's the only way you can figure you can stay alive” (“Coalition,” 356–57). Reagon's “home” is the space of identity-through-similarity that Haraway considers obsolete in a cyborgian, coalitional world.

Haraway's analysis of the breakdown of Aristotelian hierarchical dualism (“Manifesto,” 205) echoes Reagon's primary admonition:

It is very important not to confuse them—home and coalition. . . . The women's movement has perpetuated a myth that there is some common experience that comes just cause you're women. . . . If you're the same kind of women like the folk in that little barred room [marked “women only”], it works. But as soon as some other folk check the definition of “women” that's in the dictionary . . . they decide that they can come because they



are women, but when they do, they don't see or hear nothing that is like them. Then they charge, "This ain't no women's thing!" . . . And you try to figure out what happened to your wonderful barred room. It comes from taking a word like "women" and using it as a code [for "woman-identified" or "lesbian feminist"]. ("Coalition," 360)

According to Haraway, "the self feminists must code" is the cyborg, a "disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" plugged into the political "integrated circuit" of progressive coalition ("Manifesto," 205). Reagon prefigures the coalitional cyborg with a simple explanation of "why we have to have coalitions. Cause I ain't gonna let you live unless you let me live. Now there's danger in that, but there's also the possibility that we can both live—if you can stand it" ("Coalition," 365). Any brief comparison between two long works is of course reductive, but Reagon's and Haraway's similar content and distinct language is so striking as to be worth comparison. Haraway addresses the academy; Reagon (although the text of her speech has made its way into some women's studies classrooms) addresses lesbian-feminist activists gathered at a separatist cultural event. The audiences may overlap, but not by much.

As a component of institutional acceptance, academic lesbian (and gay) theory has shifted away from its origins, and away from any attempt to gain a mass movement audience. As the location, language, and audience shift, the past is often disregarded, nonacademic voices are marginalized, and readership shrinks to a small, highly educated group. Although queer theorists cannot—and should not—be required to write in the vernacular of Reagon or others, something is awry when queer theory both appropriates and erases earlier lesbian and gay theory and political literature. One consequence, for example, is the claim that queer theorists invented the notion of the lesbian (or queer) as significant because she disrupts gender norms, when the idea of lesbian as metaphor is a staple of 1970s activist thought (Zimmerman, "Lesbians," 12; Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots*, 8). Farwell comes right out and accuses queer theory of appropriating the work of Audre Lorde, particularly *Zami*, by claiming it as postmodern rather than exploring how queer theory is indebted to the work of a black lesbian feminist (*Heterosexual Plots*, 94).<sup>20</sup> Phelan recognizes the potential for co-optation of Anzaldúa's work and cautions against it: "Appropriating *mestizaje* does not serve to build alliances; it serves to convince mestizas that white women don't get it, that white women are blind to their own privilege and oblivious to the force of history. Our alliances cannot be built by grafting ourselves onto others' identities"

(*Getting Specific*, 72). Faderman goes as far as saying that queer theorists “sometimes seem to be reinventing the theoretical wheel, painting it in mauve and fuchsia, then passing it off as entirely original” (“Afterword,” 225).

In *The Highest Apple* Judy Grahn notes several examples of lesbian-feminist poets “surfac[ing] with the key words and phrases that later became full-blown movement issues and obsessions” (71), including “compulsory heterosexuality”—a term introduced by Adrienne Rich in 1980 and used without citation by Butler in 1993 (*Bodies*, 18). Perhaps “compulsory heterosexuality” had entered the queer public domain by then, but it is significant that Butler’s only citations to Rich in *Bodies That Matter* refer to an essay about Willa Cather, reinforcing a split between lesbian literature (Rich as poet) and lesbian theory (Butler as theorist) that is belied by lesbian history. Lesbian-feminist poets appear to be nowhere—and everywhere—in queer theory; to paraphrase Homans, lesbian-feminist literature and theory have vanished into queer theory.

Queer theory currently claims the limited space the academy is willing to cede to the sexually marginalized and is struggling with its own status as authority figure. It is not the existence of queer theory but rather its hegemony within the academic position of celebrity other to which its lesbian and gay critics object. Berlant and Warner caution against making “one corpus of work (often Eve Sedgwick’s or Judith Butler’s) . . . a metonym for queer theory or queer culture building itself, exemplary either for good or for bad” (“What Does,” 345). The fact remains that Sedgwick, Butler, and their followers do occupy star positions “on the academic stage” (Berlant and Warner, 348), possessing “the authority of a critical intellectualism capable of provoking yet legislating what is dangerous in philosophical thought” (Dhairyam, “Racing,” 29). “Academia encourages hegemony,” as Faderman argues, and

Queer Studies seems at present to have wrested the hegemonic mantle from gay and lesbian studies because it comes closer to employing the language and perspective of poststructuralism that has currency in the academy. Therefore, it is likely that graduate students with an interest in the discipline will feel constrained to do Queer Theory rather than any other approach to gay and lesbian studies. (“Preface,” 12)

As the marginal moves to the center, dissident voices are once again suppressed. By this I mean not only lesbian feminism, or “lesbian and gay studies,” but also the variety of “non-theorists”—working-class/lesbians of color,

poets, community organizers—whose presence disrupts both the rise to institutional power and the false dichotomy queer/lesbian-feminist that functions as definitional to queer theory and politics. Farwell points out the irony in a postmodern criticism seeing itself as part of “a grand . . . narrative of liberation that obscures lesbian-feminist thought” (*Heterosexual Plots*, 107); a simple deconstruction exposes a similar irony in positing only two, dramatically opposed, possibilities for lesbian theory.

Queer theorists seem uncomfortable with the move from being disrupters (Roof, *Lure*, 224) of “normal business in the academy” (Warner, “From Queer,” 18) to their “virtual deification” (Watney on Butler, in Warner, “From Queer,” 19). Butler attempts to shed the mantle of academic power that has been bestowed upon her:

I do not understand the notion of “theory,” and am hardly interested in being cast as its defender, much less in being signified as part of an elite gay/lesbian theory crowd that seeks to establish the legitimacy and domestication of gay/lesbian studies within the academy. Is there a pregiven distinction between theory, politics, culture, media? How do those divisions operate to quell a certain intertextual writing that might well generate wholly different epistemic maps? (Butler, “Imitation,” 14)

But it should be no surprise that choosing to cite primarily theorists with a great deal of institutional currency lands queer theory squarely within the academic “elite.”

The problem, then, is how to chart an effective middle ground for lesbian/gay/queer studies. As Lisa Duggan asks, “How can we criticize our infant field of study without engaging in mindless theory bashing and anti-intellectual posturing, or positing a moral universe in which the academy is always bad and the community (whatever that is) by definition good?” (“Scholars,” 27). Duggan proposes the sort of confluence of activist and academic, queer and lesbian-feminist, “high” and “low” theory that *Identity Poetics* attempts to model, an interdisciplinary, multi-issue approach that looks responsibly to the past, even as it is “radically anticipatory” (Berlant and Warner, “What Does,” 344) of a different world and academic order. This is largely a problem of citation, of widening one’s field of vision to acknowledge a variety of perspectives without co-opting or silencing them in the name of a “monolithic and all-subsuming paradigm [that] denies difference except as it can be supportive, aligned with the pattern” (Roof, *Lure*, 226). As long ago as 1994 Butler herself proposed that

Perhaps the time has arrived to encourage the kinds of conversations that resist the urge to stake territorial claims through the reduction or caricature of the positions from which they are differentiated. . . . There is more to learn from upsetting such grounds, reversing the exclusions by which they are instated, and resisting the institutional domestication of queer thinking. For normalizing the queer would be, after all, its sad finish. ("Against," 22)

In "The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism," Norma Alarcón argues that "Anglo-American feminist theory . . . takes for granted the linguistic status which founds subjectivity. In this way it appropriates woman/women for itself" (363). In other words, by privileging an academic discourse that is more readily accessible to white, middle-class women than to working-class/women of color (because in the United States white, middle-class women are more likely to go to college and to earn advanced degrees), feminist theory can simultaneously make reference to and exclude the words of many women who do not fit the Enlightenment mold of the "autonomous, self-conscious" and highly educated "individual" (Alarcón, "Theoretical Subjects," 363). Alarcón argues that the citation of "other" women's voices is often an appropriation of them in the service of an essentially white, middle-class, gender-standpoint epistemology. She concludes that radical works by lesbian and straight women of color have resulted in merely "cosmetic" changes in Anglo-American feminism ("Theoretical Subjects," 357).

Erin Carlston sees a somewhat different dynamic at work in the uses of Audre Lorde's "biomythography" *Zami*, which she views as "an early, important attempt to articulate a politics of location in a work of fiction," similar to but "rather more subtle than Reagon's 'Coalition Politics,' particularly in its treatment of identity" ("*Zami*," 226). Carlston explains that in *Zami* Lorde portrays identity as "positionality," that is, "identity as an unstable construct, constantly (re)produced both by and within the social matrix, and by the subject's conscious creation of her self." Carlston notes that "in this regard, Lorde prefigures more recent theoretical work by writers like Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, and Trinh Minh-ha," three women of color whose work has been influential in poststructuralist feminist criticism (Carlston, "*Zami*," 226).

Carlston invokes critic Linda Alcoff to explain what she perceives to be a weak point in Lorde's presentation of identity, the essentializing of her lesbianism. Carlston implies Lorde's naïveté relative to Alcoff's superior theo-

retical insight: "It could be argued that Lorde is less persuasive when she is most essentialist, namely, in her treatment of female sexuality, which she describes, as Alcoff would say, as a 'place where meaning can be discovered'" (*Zami*, 234). In a footnote the careful reader discovers that Carlston finds in Alcoff a "cogent analysis . . . of the kind of strategies Lorde deploys in *Zami*" (*Zami*, 236n3). Carlston quotes Alcoff at length, revealing that the idea of "positionality" comes from Alcoff's 1988 essay, "Cultural Feminist Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." In this context, Alcoff's essay may be viewed, at least in part, as a theoreticization of the ideas Lorde (and others) had put forth by 1984. Elsewhere, Carlston's description of *Zami*'s politics of location is reminiscent of Haraway's post-modern cyborg: "The experience of being marginalized within every group with which she identifies becomes a constant in Audre's story, until she finally claims and transforms that experience as the basis of her politics of location" (Carlston, "*Zami*," 231).

Perhaps the influence of women of color on Anglo-American feminism is not as superficial as Alarcón suggests. Alarcón clearly illustrates that Anglo-American gender-standpoint feminism acknowledges women of color only to "proceed to negate that difference by subsuming women of color into the unitary category of woman/women" ("Theoretical Subjects," 358). But what of postmodern feminist theory, and perhaps especially that postmodern feminist (or queer) theory that rarely cites women of color at all? Has lesbian-feminist/working-class/lesbian of color theory "vanished into" queer theory? A more thorough historical and intertextual reading of contemporary theory might reveal that marginalized activist writings are foundational to many of postmodern feminist and queer theory's most powerful ideas. In the case of lesbian/gay/queer studies, such an undertaking could begin to heal the antagonisms between factions by illustrating the relationships between the works of writers as diverse as Grahn, Parker, Lorde, Rich, Anzaldúa, Butler, Sedgwick, and de Lauretis.

### *"Scratching the Surface:" Exposing the Intertext*

*Identity Poetics* attempts to contextualize queer theory, and both benefit from the same concatenation of historical, political, literary, and theoretical sources, if to differing degrees of influence. In calling for an expanded citationality, I rely particularly on the literary critical concept of "intertextuality" to illustrate the connections between queer theory and writing by work-

ing-class/lesbian-feminist/women of color. Introduced by M. M. Bakhtin (and later employed influentially by Julia Kristeva [1969], Roland Barthes [1977], and Michael Riffaterre [1984]), intertextuality refers to "the sum of knowledge that makes it possible for texts to have meaning" (Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 104, paraphrasing Kristeva). "Every text takes shape as a mosaic of citations, every text is the absorption and transformation of other texts" (Kristeva 146, cited in Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 139). In short, intertextuality is "the way any text refers to others" (de Beaugrande, *Critical*, 272), thereby creating meaning for the reader who is on some level aware of the references being made (Suleiman, *Subversive*, 218n7). *Text*, in the sense it is used here, refers not only to books and essays but to any type of discourse or locus of meaning. Thus Linda Hutcheon discusses "history as intertextual" (*Poetics*, 142), Thais Morgan writes that "*culture* itself . . . is *radically intertextual*" ("Space," 246), and so forth. Critics allow that extraliterary discourse as intertext informs lesbian literature.<sup>21</sup> When read against contemporary poststructuralist lesbian/queer theory, the political content of the poetry under study here suggests that the opposite is also true. Literature can provide an intertext for theory, as surely as social commentary, historical circumstance, and "culture" may inform literature. Further, theories—even political ideologies themselves—can be understood intertextually.

If one takes seriously Hutcheon's proposition of "history as intertext" (*Poetics*, 142), or Morgan's "*culture* itself [as] *radically intertextual*" ("Space," 246), then it is possible to see in the succession of civil rights movements since the 1960s the allusion, repetition, even (at worst) parody that mark intertextual interplay. Certainly, the rhetoric of contemporary civil rights movements has been (at times quite consciously) intertextual: from Indian Nation to Lesbian Nation, "U.S. out of Vietnam" to "U.S. out of my uterus." Contemporary queer theory and politics are no less historically influenced and intertextually informed. The controversial adoption of the label *queer* (from Lesbian Nation to Queer Nation, from the concept of the lesbian continuum to queer) is one among many examples.

Lesbian feminism provides an intertext for queer theory in a variety of ways—on a broad conceptual level in some cases, in more detailed allusions in others. Butler's analysis of "gender performativity" and drag—which she accomplishes via deconstruction, psychoanalytic theory, and philosophy—is not the first lesbian analysis of the production of gender through socially enforced heterosexuality. Her theory resonates with lesbian-feminist analyses of feminine "drag" as symptomatic of patriarchy, with the lesbian-feminist ideal of gender subversion through androgynous behavior and appearance,

and not least with Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality (itself intertextual with the work of lesbian-feminist theorist Charlotte Bunch, among others). Butler also echoes Grahn's descriptions in *Another Mother Tongue* of butch and femme lesbians playing with gender in the 1950s (Grahn, *Another*, 31, 156, 221, 222). Grahn describes the rituals of the working-class lesbian gender performance called "butch" and analyzes its significance:

Our point was not to be men; our point was to be butch and get away with it. We always kept something back: a high-pitched voice, a slant of the head, or a limpness of hand gestures, something that was clearly labeled female. I believe our statement was "Here is another way of being a woman," not "Here is a woman trying to be taken for a man." (31)

Essays by the French lesbian-feminist writer Monique Wittig resonate in works by both Butler and Sedgwick. Echoing Simone de Beauvoir, Wittig wrote in 1981 that "one is not born a woman" but becomes one, because gender categories are "political and economic categories not eternal ones" (Wittig, *Straight Mind*, 15). Butler writes that "ontology is . . . not a foundation, but a normative injunction" (*Gender Trouble*, 148). Wittig's analysis of how one "becomes" one's gender differs from Butler's, but the two theorists' radical constructionist stances are similar. Lesbians, according to Wittig, refuse to become "women" in that "the refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not" (*Straight Mind*, 13). In her famous formulation, "Lesbians are not women," because women are defined in relationship to men; gender is socially constructed and performed, and can be politically deconstructed—this is what "lesbian society accomplishes practically" and "materialist analysis," that is, theory, "does by reasoning" (Wittig, *Straight Mind*, 32, 9). In "The Point of View: Universal or Particular" (1983) and "The Mark of Gender" (1986), Wittig employs the concept of a "minority" (and therefore ghettoizing) vs. a "universal" lesbian/gay point of view; in the introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick acknowledges the necessary existence of both "minority-model and universalist-model" political strategies. Like Wittig, Sedgwick "privilege[s] constructivist over essentialist, universalizing over minoritizing"; but when she privileges "gender-transitive over gender-separatist understandings of sexual choice," Sedgwick parts company with Wittig (*Epistemology*, 13).<sup>22</sup>

Malinowitz reports that many lesbian feminists see allegedly queer-theoretical preoccupations with

analyzing decentered subjectivity, critiquing the ways hegemonic structures reproduce themselves, and examining the ways that the notion of difference organizes society and epistemology [as] some of the most basic concerns that have guided their own work. And in truth, contemporary queer theory, though appearing to some as an extraterrestrial landing and threatening to wreak perverse acts on an undefended populace, *does* count feminism as a substantial part of its mixed lineage. ("Lesbian," 265)

Faderman points to several similarities between lesbian-feminist and queer thought: androgyny as a type of "gender fuck," feminist formulations of gender as socially constructed, a sort of early performance theory, an inclusive theoretical conception of women, opposition to sexual "puritanism through a valorization of nonmonogamy" ("Afterword," 222–24). Zimmerman notes the decades-long tradition of defining lesbian as disrupter of the heterosexist order, similarities between the early nineties poststructuralist work of Elizabeth Meese and the seventies lesbian-feminist work of Rich, Bunch, and Marilyn Frye, and, in what she terms her "old-fashioned way," relates the Lacanian concept of phallogocentrism to "what feminists have always called 'patriarchy'" (Zimmerman, "Lesbians," 5). Perhaps it is not such a stretch, then, to speculate with Dana Heller that "feminism was queer studies before queer studies was queer studies, although feminism still remains to be productively expanded by lesbian, gay, and queer studies" (*Cross Purposes*, 11).

Theory is shaped by which questions are asked, which in turn is often shaped by which texts one reads. Phelan points out that for white feminists in the seventies "[Shulamith] Firestone was the theorist, the author cited in discussions of radical feminism. She had to be dealt with in white women's education in feminism" (*Getting Specific*, 28). In the mid eighties the authors were Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Adrienne Rich, the texts *Sister Outsider* and *This Bridge Called My Back*. And in the nineties they were Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*. Which texts will we read or teach in the coming decades? To return to Holland's question, *how* will we employ them? The answers to these questions, of course, have a great deal to do with who the "we" of lesbian theory will be. The cross-genre writings of working-class/lesbians of color must be central to theorizing in order to overcome the debate which is not one and to build lesbian theories that are coalitional, dynamic, and broadly influential in both academic and activist spheres.

A rigorous intertextual reading, a more explicit, accountable practice of citationality, could go far in creating the sort of textual and activist alliances



that are so urgently needed but so rarely forged. “Lesbian, gay, and queer studies” must open up to working-class/lesbians of color instead of continuing to either swallow them up or ignore them (or both, since one sometimes looks like the other). Who knows what fascinating and productive turns theoretical discussions would take then? One thing is clear: the debates, publications, conferences, and departments would not look the same as they do now, and that’s a positive step out of an old exclusionary rut.